

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 TUNIS 02899 01 OF 02 241152Z

10

ACTION NEA-07

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 EUR-08 NSC-05 NSCE-00 INR-05

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PRS-01 PM-03 SP-02 ACDA-10 AF-04

OMB-01 MC-01 /062 W

----- 098898

R 231715Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2509

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USCINCEUR

USCINCSUNAVEUR

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 TUNIS 2899

LIMDIS

USCINCEUR AND CINCUSNAVEUR ALSO FOR POLADS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR MASS TS LY

SUBJECT: PERCEIVED MILITARY THREAT TO TUNISIA

1. SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION: THIS MESSAGE ATTEMPTS TO PULL TOGETHER WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED OVER THE LAST FEW MONTHS ABOUT TUNISIAN PERCEPTIONS OF A MILITARY THREAT, WHAT THE TUNISIANS ARE DOING ABOUT IT, AND WHAT THEY EXPECT AND HOPE FROM US AND FROM OTHER FRIENDLY COUNTRIES. IT DOES NOT ATTEMPT TO RECOMMEND NEW POLICIES OR INITIATIVES, BUT DOES TRY TO PROVIDE SOME BACKGROUND FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION OF TUNISIA'S DEFENSE NEEDS WHILE MAKING SOME SUGGESTIONS ON WHAT OUR POSTURE SHOULD BE FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE. END SUMMARY.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 TUNIS 02899 01 OF 02 241152Z

2. OVERVIEW: SINCE INDEPENDENCE THE GOT HAS WISELY,

AND SUCCESSFULLY, CONCENTRATED ON MAINTAINING AN EFFECTIVE INTERNAL SECURITY ORGANIZATION. SECONDARY ATTENTION HAS GONE TO MAINTAINING A VERY MODEST DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT, SO FAR REMARKABLY FREE OF POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT, THIS HAPPY STATE OF AFFAIRS MAY BE COMING TO AN END, WITH INCREASING POLARIZATION OF NORTH AFRICA (AND TO CERTAIN EXTENT AS RESULT OF TUNISIAN FOREIGN POLICY MISCALCULATIONS, E.G. DJERBA DECLARATION AND COMING DOWN TOO HARD ON SIDE OF MOROCCO IN SAHARA DISPUTE). TUNISIA'S GROWING CONCERN OVER ITS MILITARY WEAKNESS HAS COME TO A FOCUS WITH INTERCEPTION OF THREE-MAN LIBYAN ASSASSINATION TEAM. GOT SEEMS TO HAVE FINALLY DECIDED THERE NO POINT IN TRYING TO GET ALONG WITH QADHAFI ANY LONGER. THIS HAS BROUGHT GOT FACE TO FACE WITH FACT THAT IF THEY CANNOT BE FRIENDS WITH ALL OF THEIR NEIGHBORS THEY WILL NO LONGER BE ABLE TO TAKE A RELAXED VIEW OF THE STATE OF READINESS OF TUNISIAN DEFENSE. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT GOT HAS REACHED A CONSENSUS ON WHAT TO DO OR INDEED A CONSENSUS ON SERIOUSNESS OF THREAT FROM LIBYA (AND LONG-RANGE POTENTIAL THREAT FROM ALGERIA). AS A RESULT TUNISIA IS CASTING ABOUT FOR WAYS OF STRENGTHENING ITS ARMED FORCES IN FASHION THAT SOMETIMES GIVES CURIOUS IMPRESSION THAT GOT DOES NOT KNOW ITSELF WHAT IT WANTS. TO CERTAIN EXTENT THIS IS TRUE; BUT IN COMING MONTHS SITUATION WILL SHAKE DOWN AND WILL PRESENT US WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP TUNISIANS ADDRESS THEIR MOST URGENT TASKS, WHICH IS TO GET PRESENT TUNISIAN ARMED FORCES AND EQUIPMENT INTO GOOD WORKING ORDER.

3. STATE OF READINESS: BASED ON RECENT QUICK SURVEY OF TUNISIAN MILITARY UNITS (CHUSLOT 231030Z APR 76) AND OTHER KNOWLEDGE WE HAVE ACQUIRED OVER RECENT MONTHS, EMBASSY IS INCLINED TO BELIEVE TUNISIAN ARMED FORCES ARE NOT RPT NOT BADLY DIRECTED AND ARE MAKING SOMETHING LIKE THE BEST OF A SITUATION GOVERNED BY CIVILIAN-ORIENTED ELEMENTS, AND GIVEN HISTORY OF MINIMAL WEAPONS SUPPLY AUGMENTED BY INADEQUATE SPARE-PARTS REQUISITIONING. THUS, TROOPS IN ARMY CAMPS APPEAR WELL DRILLED AND DISCIPLINED AND OPERATIVE EQUIPMENT LOOKS GENERALLY WELL MAINTAINED. FORCE LEVEL IS MINISCULE; NINE OBSOLESCENT INTERCEPTOR AIRCRAFT OUT OF ELEVEN IN INVENTORY ARE FLYABLE, THOUGH

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 TUNIS 02899 01 OF 02 241152Z

OF QUESTIONABLE EFFICIENCY AGAINST MODERN ATTACK AIRCRAFT, ESPECIALLY IN ABSENCE OF EFFECTIVE EARLY WARNING RADAR SYSTEM; ONE COMPANY (12 TANKS) OF M48'S CAN OPERATE, WHILE THE OTHER U.S.-SUPPLIED ARMORED COMPANY -- ANCIENT M41 TANKS -- IS OUT OF ACTION, AND PERHAPS WORN OUT, WITH RESPECT TO AT LEAST TWO-THIRDS OF ITS EQUIPMENT. THERE IS ONE COMPANY OF AMX-13 FRENCH-SUPPLIED TANKS, SAID TO BE OPERATING IN THE SOUTH (ALL U.S.-SUPPLIED ARMOR IS AT

REGIMENTAL HEADQUARTERS IN BIZERTE, FAR FROM ANY LIBYAN GROUND ASSAULT POTENTIAL) BUT WE LACK INFORMATION ON NUMBER AND EFFECTIVENESS. NAVAL PATROL CRAFT ARE APPARENTLY RUNNING SCREENING MISSIONS IN GULF OF GABES, BUT EFFORT TO STAFF THESE VESSELS HAS STRIPPED ONLY MAJOR TUNISIAN NAVAL UNIT, DESTROYER BOURGUIBA, OF SOME OF ITS BETTER DECK OFFICERS.

4. LIBYAN THREAT: THE EMBASSY HAS NO RPT NO WAY OF ASSESSING LIBYAN CAPABILITY TO ATTACK TUNISIA, EITHER VIA AIR ASSAULTS ON KEY INSTALLATIONS OR BY GROUND ATTACK ACROSS SOUTHERN FRONTIER. CONVENTIONAL WISDOM IS THAT ORGANIZATIONAL WEAKNESSES WOULD PREVENT ANY LIBYAN EFFORT FROM ACHIEVING STRATEGIC SUCCESS, THOUGH PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF EVEN MINOR LIBYAN MILITARY SUCCESSES COULD BE HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT. WHAT WE DO KNOW OF TUNISIAN MILITARY READINESS SUGGESTS THAT STRATEGIC SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF ANY LIBYAN MOVE WILL DEPEND NOT ONLY ON TUNISIAN MILITARY RESPONSE BUT PERHAPS EVEN MORE ON LIBYAN FORCES OWN INEFFECTU- CIENCY, TIME, WEATHER AND TERRAIN. TUNISIAN MINISTRY OF DEFENSE KNOWS THIS, WE THINK. CHARGED WITH MISSION OF DEFENDING COUNTRY AGAINST POSSIBLE MILITARY ASSAULTS, MOD MUST MAKE THE BEST OF ITS ASSETS AND SEEMS TO BE DOING SO. UNIT COMMANDERS APPEAR TO BE UNDERGOING PROCESS OF TDY ORIENTATION IN SOUTHERN BORDER AREAS. MILITARY VEHICULAR MOVEMENTS IN TUNIS CITY AREA SEEM TO HAVE INCREASED, THOUGH WE CANNOT, AS OF NOW, SAY THAT THERE IS EVIDENCE OF SIZEABLE DISPLACEMENT OF ARMY UNITS TOWARD SOUTHERN BORDER. DISPATCH OF PATROL CRAFT, AND SECONDING OF TUNISIAN DESTROYER'S OFFICERS TO THESE VESSELS, SUGGESTS MOD SERIOUSLY CONTEMPLATES POSSIBLE LIBYAN MOVES ACROSS OR OVER GULF OF GABES WHICH THESE PATROL CRAFT WOULD HAVE LITTLE CHANCE OF PREVENTING, THOUGH THEY MIGHT PROVIDE MINIMAL EARLY WARNING OF LIBYAN AGGRESSIVE
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 TUNIS 02899 01 OF 02 241152Z

MOVES.

SECRET

NNN

SECRET

PAGE 01 TUNIS 02899 02 OF 02 240530Z

10

ACTION NEA-07

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 EUR-08 NSC-05 NSCE-00 INR-05

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PRS-01 PM-03 SP-02 ACDA-10 AF-04

OMB-01 MC-01 /062 W

----- 092364

R 231715Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2510

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USCINCEUR

USCINCUSNAVEUR

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 TUNIS 2899

LIMDIS

USCINCEUR AND CINCUSNAVEUR ALSO FOR POLADS

5. AIR DEFENSES: MINISTRY OF DEFENSE DOGMA AT PRESENT TIME IS THAT GRAVEST TUNISIAN WEAKNESS IS IN AIR DEFENSE. THIS IS JUSTIFICATION FOR DEFENSE DEPUTY MINISTER'S PITCH TO US RECENTLY TO PROVIDE INCREASED FMS CREDIT TO ENABLE GOT TO BUY SOPHISTICATED AIR DEFENSE SYSTEM. BUT DEPUTY DEFENSE MINISTER BENNOUR MUST KNOW THAT, EVEN IF USG GAVE EVERYTHING HE HAS ASKED FOR, AN OPERATIONAL AIR DEFENSE SYSTEM WOULD BE YEARS DOWN THE PIKE. USG LETTERS OF OFFER FOR MODERN INTER-CEPTOR AIRCRAFT HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO LAPSE, AND GOT HAS NOT RPT NOT RECENTLY RAISED SUBJECT OF AIRCRAFT WITH US.

6. PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS: IF THERE IS WITHIN GOT A SENSE OF DESPERATION, IT HAS NOT BEEN SHARED WITH US,
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 TUNIS 02899 02 OF 02 240530Z

ONE OF TUNISIA'S ODEST AND MOST CONSTANT FRIENDS. OVER PAST MONTHS WE HAVE BEEN ASSURED AT HIGH LEVEL THAT GOT HAS NO PROBLEMS MAKING ITS NEEDS KNOWN TO USG (ALTHOUGH THERE IS THE UNSTATED CAVEAT THAT GOT IS NOT ALWAYS HAPPY WITH DEGREE OF USG'S WILLINGNESS TO PROVIDE WHAT IS ASKED). DEPUTY DEFENSE MINISTER BENNOUR'S REQUEST FOR INCREASED FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE HAS NOT RPT NOT BEEN REFLECTED IN ANY OTHER GOT

APPROACH TO US IN TUNIS, NOR HAS GOT VOLUNTEERED TO US THAT BENNOUR IS INDEED ACTING DEFENSE MINISTER, SINCE GOT SEEMS TO BE KEEPING SECRET THE FACT THAT DEFENSE MINISTER KHEFACHA IS SERIOUSLY ILL IN PARIS. FROM SUBORDINATE LEVELS OF THE DEFENSE MINISTRY WE HAVE RECEIVED INDICATIONS THAT, IF BENNOUR'S REQUEST FOR MORE SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS IS REFUSED, MOD WILL BE HAPPY TO BUY CONVENTIONAL ARMS WITH THE AUGMENTED FMS CREDITS WE HAVE PROMISED THEM.

7. OTHER SOURCES OF AID: THE FRENCH ARE GOT'S OTHER MAJOR FRIEND, AND THERE HAS BEEN A FRENCH MILITARY TEAM, HEADED BY A GENERAL, IN TUNISIA UNTIL NOW, REVIEWING THE TUNISIAN MILITARY SITUATION AND, REPORTEDLY, RECOMMENDING CERTAIN STRUCTURAL CHANGES WITHIN THE MOD. IN ADDITION, IN THE WAKE OF PRESIDENT GISCARD'S VISIT HERE IN NOVEMBER LAST YEAR, THERE ARE REPORTS OF RECENT DELIVERIES OF FRENCH TANKS, DIRECTLY TO SOUTHERN TUNISIAN PORTS. THERE IS ALSO EVIDENCE THE TUNISIANS HAVE BEEN TALKING ARMS ELSEWHERE. CHINA HAS APPARENTLY AGREED TO SUPPLY A COUPLE OF PATROL BOATS, AND MOD HAS DISPATCHED SOME PEOPLE TO CHINA TO STUDY THEIR OPERATION CHINESE SMALL-ARMS FOR SEVERAL THOUSAND TUNISIAN TROOPS WERE SUPPOSEDLY PROMISED BUT WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE OF DELIVERY. MILITARY TALKS HAVE BEEN HELD WITH YUGOSLAVIA, WHICH MAKES A GROUND-TO-GROUND MISSILE OF POSSIBLE INTEREST TO TUNISIAN ARMY, AND WITH CZECHOSLOVAKIA, AUSTRIA, AND WESTERN GERMANY. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT ANY DELIVERIES HAVE FOLLOWED THESE TALKS. THERE IS STRONG EVIDENCE THAT GOT HAS REJECTED PAST SOVIET ARMS OFFERS. FINALLY, WE STRONGLY SUSPECT, BUT CANNOT PRODUCE EVIDENCE TO SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 TUNIS 02899 02 OF 02 240530Z

SUPPORT, THAT CURRENT TRAVELS OF PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S SON AND WIFE IN EASTERN ARAB WORLD RELATED TO SEARCH FOR FINANCING FOR ARMS PURCHASES.

8. ROLE OF U.S.: USG'S RESPONSE TO TUNISIAN CONCERNS HAS TAKEN FORM OF INCREASING FMS CREDITS IN FY 1976 FROM PREVIOUS \$5 MILLION ANNUAL LEVEL TO \$15 MILLION. WE ARE ALSO RESPONDING TO MOD'S URGENT REQUEST TO AIR SHIP CERTAIN SPARE PARTS NEEDED TO BRING EXISTING TUNISIAN ARMOR TO HIGHER STATE OF READINESS WE ARE SUPPLYING JET FUEL UNDER FMS PROGRAM TO KEEP TUNISIAN INTERCEPTOR AIRCRAFT FLYING, AND WE HAVE PUT AND ARE PUTTING VERY CONSIDERABLE SIXTH FLEET RESOURCES INTO IMPROVING TUNISIAN DESTROYER PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S OPERATING

CONDITION. IN SHORT WE ARE DOING, AND EMBASSY BELIEVES WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO DO, AS PROMPTLY AND RESPONSIVELY AS POSSIBLE, EVERYTHING WE CAN WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF EXISTING PROGRAMS AND AUTHORITY. SIXTH FLEET VISITS VERY MUCH WITHIN THIS FRAMEWORK. PROPOSED SCHEDULING OF NUCLEAR POWERED WARSHIP VISITS TO TUNISIAN PORTS LATER THIS YEAR PROVIDES US WITH OPPORTUNITY TO COMBINE SUBSTANTIAL BENEFIT TO USG WITH PROVISION TO GOT OF WHAT THEY MAY VIEW AS REASSURANCE: WHEN SO INSTRUCTED BY DEPARTMENT (TUNIS 2609) EMBASSY WILL INITIATE TALKS WITH GOT AIMED AT GAINING AGREEMENT FOR SUCH VISITS.

9. PRESENT POSTURE: FINALLY, WE BELIEVE THAT AS GOT BEGINS TO ELABORATE ITS DEFENSE POLICY UNDER CONDITIONS THAT NOW EXIST IN NORTH AFRICA WE WILL HAVE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK MORE CLOSELY WITH TUNISIANS IN MAKING BEST POSSIBLE USE OF AUGMENTED FMS CREDITS. NEW HEAD OF USLOT HAS ALREADY MADE EXCELLENT BEGINNING IN THIS DIRECTION. WE SHOULD ACCEPT, HOWEVER, THAT WE WILL CONTINUE TO RECEIVE REQUESTS FOR MILITARY ASSISTANCE BEYOND OUR CAPABILITIES AND BEYOND ECONOMIC RESOURCES THAT TUNISIA CAN MUSTER. TUNISIANS WILL ALSO TEND TO PANIC FROM TIME TO TIME IN RESPONSE TO AGGRESSIVE NOISES OR ACTIONS BY QADHAFI, OR BY BOUMEDIENE.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 TUNIS 02899 02 OF 02 240530Z

THEY FEEL GREAT NEED FOR OUR MORAL SUPPORT. THIS CAN BE DEMONSTRATED THROUGH OUR FMS PROGRAM, REGULAR SIXTH FLEET VISITS, HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL CONTACTS, AND PARTICULARLY BE DEGREE OF RESPONSIVENESS TO SPECIFIC TUNISIAN REQUESTS WHICH WE CAN MAKE WITHIN PRESENT POLICY GUIDELINES.

KING

SECRET

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ARMED FORCES, INTERVENTION, PFOR MASS TS LY, THREATS, MILITARY LOGISTICS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 23 APR 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: saccheem
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976TUNIS02899
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: RR
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760156-1001
From: TUNIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760427/aaaaawpl.tel
Line Count: 316
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: saccheem
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <21 APR 2004 by buchant0>; APPROVED <12 AUG 2004 by saccheem>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PERCEIVED MILITARY THREAT TO TUNISIA
TAGS: PFOR, MASS, TS, LY
To: SECSTATE WASHDC ALGIERS CAIRO PARIS RABAT TRIPOLI USCINCUER USCINCUSNAVERU
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006